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Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-12 /098 W
----------003071 271017Z /11
R 270845Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0100
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 2462

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR KS KN CH
SUBJ: ROK VIEWS ON RUMORS OF HUA VISIT TO PEKING

REF: (A) PEKING 797 (NOTAL)

1. ROK MEDIA AND INDIVIDUAL OBSERVERS HAVE DISPLAYED UNUSUALLY DISPASSIONATE AND RELATIVELY OPTIMISTIC ATTITUDE IN RESPONSE TO REPORTS THAT CHAIRMAN HUA WOULD VISIT PYONGYANG. EDITORIALS IN MOST AFTERNOON PAPERS MARCH 23 SAW VISIT AS PART OF NEW FOCUS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS BY PRC LEADERS, AND AS ELEMENT IN SINO-SOVIET COMPETITION, RATHER THAN AS HARBINGER OF RENEWED COMMUNIST HOSTILITY. SOME PAPERS, NOTABLY TONGA ILBO, RAISED SPECTRE OF PRC SUPPORT FOR NORTH KOREAN AGGRESSION AS A POSSIBILITY, AND CAUTIONED AGAINST THE "IMPLACABLE" AMBITIONS OF THE COMMUNISTS. HOWEVER, NONE OF THE PUBLISHED COMMENTS
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STRESSED THE NEGATIVE PROSPECTS OF THE VISIT. CHUNGANG ILBO EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE PRC "WANTS TO MAINTAIN STABILITY IN ASIA", WHILE THE OFFICIAL SEOUL SINMUN VOICED THE HOPE THAT "PEKING'S PEACE POLICY WILL FAVORABLY INFLUENCE KIM IL-SONG AND CHECK HIS MILITARY ADVERTURISM".

2. PRIVATE COMMENTS BY ONE ROK CHINA WATCHER WERE SIMILARLY

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RESTRAINED, STRESSING THE SINO-SOVIET COMPETITION AND SOFT-PEDALLING THE USUAL FEARS OF COMMUNIST AGGRESSIVE INTENT. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS HAVE ALSO BEEN RELUCTANT TO COMMENT ON THE VISIT IN RESPONSE TO EMBASSY INQUIRIES. THE CHINA DIVISION DIRECTOR, ASKED ABOUT THE VISIT, SIMPLY REFERRED TO PRESS COMMENTARY, WITHOUT EXPRESSING ANY INDE-PENDENT VIEW. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE JAPANESE PRESS OVER THE WEEKEND HAD FEATURED REPORTS THAT THE NORTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR IN PEKING, TALKING TO JSP CHAIRMAN ASUKATA, HAD DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRIP.

3. COMMENT: THE RELATIVE UNIFORMITY AND OPTIMISM OF BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE KOREAN REACTION TO HUA'S REPORTED TRIP SUGGEST THAT THE ROKG HAD PUT OUT FAIRLY STRICT GUIDELINES ON THE SUBJECT, PRESUMABLY AIMED BOTH AT ATTENUATING THE USUAL NEGATIVE KOREAN REACTION TO COMMUNIST LEADER'S MEETINGS, AND AT MAINTAINING THE OFFICIAL ROK POSITION IN FAVOR OF AN OPENING TOWARD PEKING.

4. WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING ANY FURTHER WORD PEKING OR OTHER POSTS MAY HAVE REGARDING CURRENT PROSPECT FOR THE TRIP, IN LIGHT OF THE AASUKATA STORY.
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